

Final
Report
HumRRO
FR-02-27
June 2002

Defining Proficient Student Work: An Early Examination of Kentucky's Training Program Titled "Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond"

Arthur A. Thacker
Lisa E. Koger
Milton E. Koger
Richard C. Deatz
Julia G. Coleman
R. Gene Hoffman

Prepared for:
The Kentucky Department of Education
500 Mero Street
Frankfort, KY 40601

Contract Number M-00003669

Acknowledgments

The authors of this report would like to thank the teachers, principals, and district and regional representatives who took time out of their busy schedules to talk with us. Without their cooperation this study would not have been possible. We would also like to recognize the other school personnel and students for graciously welcoming us into their schools and classrooms. The office staff at each of the participating schools handled the lion's share of the coordination for interviews and observations and are to be commended for their excellent work. All of these people helped us in our attempts to represent Kentucky's schools honestly and accurately within the context of this report. While the authors are appreciative of the comments and suggestions provided by staff members at the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) regarding the research presented in this report, the opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not represent the opinion or policy of KDE.

DEFINING PROFICIENT STUDENT WORK: AN EARLY EXAMINATION OF KENTUCKY’S TRAINING PROGRAM TITLED “SPOTLIGHT ON PROFICIENCY AND BEYOND”

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	ii
Abstract.....	iv
Background.....	1
Introduction.....	3
Sampling.....	3
Methodology.....	4
Limitations of the Study	4
Description of Data	5
Discussion.....	5
Districts Exhibiting a High Level of Implementation.....	7
Dogwood District.....	7
Redbud District	14
Spruce District.....	18
Districts Exhibiting a Typical Level of Implementation	19
Cottonwood District.....	20
Persimmon District.....	24
Poplar District.....	28
Districts Exhibiting a Low Level of Implementation	31
Catalpa District	31
Willow District	34
School Use of Data	35
Disaggregated Data.....	35
Gender	36
Socioeconomic status	36
Minority and English as a Second Language (ESL)	37
Extended School Services	38
Special education	38
Interpretation and Recommendations	39
Bibliography.....	42
Appendix A Correspondence with Participating Schools.....	A-1
Appendix B Research Instruments	B-1

Defining Proficient Student Work: An Early Examination of Kentucky's Training Program Titled "Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond"

Abstract

During Fall 2001, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), with the help of Kentucky's eight Regional Service Centers, trained more than 2,000 educators in the use of new student proficiency descriptions/standards. The training program, called Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond, used descriptions of each of Kentucky's four proficiency levels (Novice, Apprentice, Proficient, and Distinguished) coupled with actual student work samples to define what is meant by the term 'proficient.' At the end of the 2-day training, those trained were to take the training back to their respective schools. The stated goals of the program were to 1) understand the need for new performance standards and the standards setting process, 2) become familiar with the performance level descriptions, 3) analyze student work using the performance level descriptions, and 4) plan for next steps for sharing and using performance level descriptions. This study was designed to investigate the early implementation of the training program and the performance level descriptions in schools and classrooms.

The Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) conducted site visits in 23 schools (8 elementary, 8 middle, and 7 high schools) and interviewed 262 educators as part of this study. Schools were recommended by the Regional Service Center directors and were selected from each of the eight academic regions of the state. Training at the school level varied greatly from district to district and from school to school. At the highest level of implementation, schools trained all staff, certified and non-certified, with each staff member receiving the full 2-day train-the-trainer program. At the lowest level of implementation, school personnel did not know that the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training existed. Most schools in the study fell somewhere between those two extremes, and most teachers spent from half an hour to about 1 day in training.

The most important finding from the study was that all participating schools were undergoing some process for identifying and standardizing the classroom definition of 'proficient' student work. Not all the schools were using the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training; in fact, some had purposefully chosen to use some other means of achieving this goal. However, those that were using the training were generally positive regarding its usefulness and impact. Teachers typically described the impact of the training in terms of improved student assessment and instruction, particularly with regard to open-response questions. Teachers often reported that they were better able to write open-response questions, inform students of their expectations (through the use of improved rubrics provided prior to assignments), evaluate student work once it was completed, and help students rewrite and improve their work as they strive towards proficiency.

Background

In order to provide context regarding the contents of this report, it might be helpful to consider some of the research leading up to it. The Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) planned this research project under the direction and with the assistance of the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE). Both organizations considered previously completed research during the planning stages of the project. This section provides a very brief overview of that research.

In 1996, KDE hired HumRRO to conduct validity and reliability research that was required as part of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA, KRS 158.645). Since then, HumRRO researchers have visited dozens of schools around the state, interviewing hundreds of teachers and their school and district administrators and observing classes that ranged from kindergarten through high school. HumRRO researchers have also conducted workshops that brought together teachers from several schools as part of their research efforts. These interviews, observations, and workshops resulted in a series of reports that examined validity and reliability issues for the state.

The first such report, *Changes in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and subject/verb agreement skills under the Kentucky Education Reform Act* (Hoffman, Koger, & Awbrey, 1997), examined writing test responses from two cohorts (1993 and 1996) of 4th grade students. The purpose of the research was to determine whether students' skills in writing mechanics were declining, as some concerned parents and educators believed, or improving under KERA. The results indicated that students improved their holistic writing scores and spelling, with a composite index of capitalization, punctuation, and subject/verb agreement remaining stable. In addition, boys showed improvement in spelling and on the composite index, while girls did not improve, but were attempting to use more complex concepts.

The first report that resulted from a series of school visits was *The relationship between school gains in 8th grade KIRIS scores and instructional practices in mathematics, science, and social studies* (Hoffman, Harris, Koger, & Thacker, 1997). HumRRO researchers sent surveys to mathematics, science, and social studies teachers at 20 middle schools selected both by overall KIRIS (Kentucky Instructional Results Information System) scores and by gains on KIRIS. Researchers then visited those schools and interviewed teachers, administrators, and students and observed classes. The resulting report described a link found between reform-friendly classroom practices and higher scores and gains on the KIRIS test. Those results were verified and expanded during the 1997-98 academic year (Harris, Hoffman, Koger, & Thacker, 1998).

In fall 1997, HumRRO researchers conducted a series of workshops with middle school science and social studies teachers. The purpose of these workshops was to examine to what extent teachers used the *Core Content for Assessment* (Kentucky Department of Education, 1996) in their classrooms. In the report (Thacker, Hoffman, & Koger, 1998), teachers reported that, although it was a primary source for curricular planning, they still did not know how deep to go when covering topics included in the Core Content for Assessment and they did not know what would appear on the state assessment.

Researchers next visited 30 middle schools to determine the impact professional development was having on teachers and schools under KERA (Thacker, Koger L., & Koger M., 1998). Teachers and administrators reported that professional development had become more focused, more frequent, and of better quality than it had been 2 or 3 years preceding the study; however, there was no clear link established between professional development and student performance.

In addition to writing reports based on school visits and teacher interviews, HumRRO researchers have examined possible connections between KIRIS test results and other measures. For example, a HumRRO researcher examined the link between student transience and results on KIRIS tests (Medsker, 1998). Medsker found that schools with higher student transience rates had lower mean test results, while schools with medium or low student transience rates had mean test results that ranged from low to high. HumRRO researchers also analyzed the relationship between 8th grade students' open-response scores and their CTBS-5 test scores as 9th graders (Hoffman & Tannen, 1998). Researchers found that correlations between CTBS-5 multiple-choice questions and KIRIS open-response questions in reading, science, and social studies ranged from the low- to mid-.50s; in mathematics, .70; and in writing, .36. Except for writing, the correlations were felt to be about on target—they were high enough to suggest that there is a relationship, but not so high as to preclude differences in the knowledge and skills being assessed by the two different testing methods. A third report based on correlations between KIRIS and other measures was also completed in 1998. It measured relationships between open-response tests, ACT scores, and students' self-reported high school grades (Hoffman, 1998). The researcher examined scores of students who took both the ACT and KIRIS tests and found that the scores appeared to be appropriately related, much as KIRIS and CTBS-5 scores were related—neither too high nor too low.

In 1998, the state revised the testing system, eliminating KIRIS and replacing it with the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System, or CATS. HumRRO research then focused on the transition from KIRIS to CATS as teachers and administrators learned to work with the new system. In 1999, HumRRO prepared its initial report that examined this transition period (Thacker, Koger L., Hoffman, & Koger M., 1999). Researchers visited 20 schools around the state shortly before the first round of CATS testing and asked teachers if the change from KIRIS to CATS would have an impact on instructional practices already in use. They also asked teachers if CATS would be an improvement over KIRIS. Most teachers reported that they were not making significant changes to their instruction during the transition; in fact, they reported that such changes had already been made as they learned to work with the previous testing system. They also reported that they did not feel particularly well informed about the new system. The following academic year, the pool of schools visited was expanded from 20 to 31. In a break from the usual pattern of late winter/early spring visits, researchers visited in fall 1999, shortly after CATS results were received, so that results and reactions to the results would be fresh in the minds of teachers and administrators. The resulting report (Thacker, Koger L., Hoffman, & Koger M., 2000) showed a consensus among participants that the new system was better, and that educators were especially supportive of the reduction in the number of portfolio pieces. However, they raised familiar complaints regarding the perceived unfairness of testing different cohorts of students in a single grade.

The final report discussed in this section investigated programs that contribute to school success (Thacker, Koger L., Koger M., & Hoffman, 2001). HumRRO researchers visited 14 schools and asked teachers and principals to describe current programs they thought contributed to their success. Common themes included programs that dealt with literacy and mathematics proficiency, helping low performing students improve, funding issues, and school leadership issues.

Introduction

The current research is targeted toward a new teacher professional development program called Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond. The training was designed, in part, as a method of disseminating Kentucky's new student proficiency descriptions or student performance standards (training materials use both names). The descriptions/standards themselves require some interpretation, so another other goal of the training was to make the descriptions meaningful for trainees. The training couples the descriptions with actual student writing samples to describe proficient student work. The training modules were completed during Summer 2001 and teachers were trained during the Fall 2001 semester. HumRRO's goal during this research was to describe the implementation and impact of this training program.

Sampling

Kentucky's eight Regional Service Center (RSC) directors recommended the schools included in the sample. Each director was asked to select one elementary, middle, and high school. They were asked to include schools that were well represented at the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training. The directors were also asked to attempt to recommend schools in a single district and feeder pattern (such that a large proportion of the elementary students would be expected to attend the recommended middle and high schools). The original sampling plan called for visiting one elementary, middle, and high school from each of Kentucky's service center regions for a total of 24 schools. RSC directors were asked to provide this information because of the large role the RSCs played in training the school-level trainers for the program.

The final sample included one elementary and one middle school from each of Kentucky's eight regions. High schools were included from seven regions, although one participated only via telephone interview. Another high school cancelled our scheduled visit due to an unanticipated school closing and did not participate at all. Finally, one recommended high school could not participate and was replaced by another located in the same region and county, but not the same district as the associated middle and elementary school. The elementary and middle schools are part of the county school district, while the high school is in an independent district.

Methodology

Once the RSC directors recommended schools to be included in the study, each school was contacted via telephone and FAX. Typically the RSC director alerted the selected schools to expect our contact. A copy of the initial contact FAX is included in Appendix A. Once the schools agreed to allow HumRRO researchers to visit, a time was scheduled and a more comprehensive FAX description of the study was sent. The second FAX included a scheduling worksheet and an information form to facilitate the school visit (e.g. school hours, motel recommendation), all of which can be found in Appendix A.

A team of two researchers visited each selected school for 1 full day. During the visit researchers conducted interviews with teachers and administrators and observed classes. Interviews were semi-structured using protocols prepared for this study (Appendix B). Because of their differing perspectives, teacher and administrator interview protocols were slightly different. However, the interview protocols were designed to be complementary, allowing comparisons between teachers' and administrators' responses to specific questions. Teacher interviews were conducted during teachers' planning periods whenever possible. Teachers were interviewed individually when possible, although several group interviews were conducted in order to accommodate teachers' schedules. Interviews were given preference over classroom observations.

In most cases a small group of teachers and administrators attended a regional training session and they then trained the remaining staff. When decisions regarding whom to interview were necessary (due to time constraints, etc.), researchers chose trainers first, trained staff second, and untrained staff last. Principals were asked to assist with scheduling interviews and observations.

Limitations of the Study

Interpretations of the results of this study have several important limitations. Despite attempts to represent Kentucky geographically, our sample is too small to be truly representative of the larger population of Kentucky schools. In addition, the sample was purposefully chosen to illustrate the implementation of the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training. The RSC directors were asked to recommend schools with trained personnel for inclusion in the study.

In addition, the sample of schools does not represent the full scope of training options for the program. The sample demonstrates a wide range of time and effort placed on using the student performance descriptions, but RSC directors were quick to point out that the training was individualized according to each district's needs. There is a great deal of variability in the way the training was conducted and then implemented within each of the regions. This study focused only on one such training opportunity from each of the eight regions. Because of these important limitations, this study should be considered illustrative rather than quantitative.

Description of Data

Data collected for this study included researchers' notes regarding each visited school, interview responses from individuals and groups of educators, classroom observation notes, and documents provided by participating schools detailing the implementation of the training. Table 1 presents the number of people interviewed in each district. A total of 262 participants were interviewed as part of this study.

Table 1.
Number of people interviewed in each district

Dogwood	37	Redbud	37
Poplar	24	Persimmon	37
Willow	24	Spruce	33
Catalpa	36	Cottonwood	34

Data was entered into a qualitative data analysis computer program, QSR NUD*IST. The data was categorized according to its source and type. Responses were analyzed by category using the same computer program. Early categories included interview item numbers and training category (trained [regional], trained [at school], or untrained). Once those reports were compiled, other categories were selected based on the results. For instance, time spent training was chosen as a category and used to generate a report detailing the level of implementation of the training based on time.

Discussion

The first important finding from this study is that Kentucky has trained a great number of educators as part of the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond effort. The RSC directors did not have exact counts of the number of participants at the time of the study, but each RSC typically trained hundreds of teachers, administrators, and other school personnel. Those who attended the training conducted at the regional level usually held a similar training for their own school personnel. The resulting number of teachers trained in Kentucky is easily several thousand.

Beyond the fact that a large number of teachers and other school personnel were trained, the variability of the training and its implementation, by district and by school, make other generalizations difficult. School-level training ranged from a 2-day workshop held on professional development days, to less than 1 hour of discussion during a regularly scheduled after-school faculty meeting. This variability makes it particularly difficult to ascertain the impact of the training on classroom instruction and assessment.

In addition to the high level of variability between districts and schools, the difficulty in describing the impact of the training was further obscured by other similar training and programs already in place at the schools when the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training was conducted. Several schools had already implemented curriculum maps, pacing guides, open response professional development, or portfolio training, all of which can include samples of student work and sample rubrics. Separating the effects of one training program from another was

often impossible, given the complex nature of schools.

This study was designed to describe the implementation of the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training in the selected schools. The design does not allow for statements regarding the statewide impact of the program because the sample is not necessarily generalizable to the rest of the schools in Kentucky. The following sections are arranged by district from high levels of implementation to low. The levels of implementation described refer to the requirements placed on trainees and the numbers of trainees in the system. The ordering of the districts was reached through a consensus building exercise conducted with all the visiting researchers and should only be considered as an organizational device for reporting on the differences in implementation from district to district. In order to protect the confidentiality of the schools and personnel who provided the data contained in the report, pseudonyms were used for all participating schools, districts, and regions.

Each county visited is reported as if it were a single district, although in one case the three schools visited come from two districts located in the same county. A brief overview is provided for each district, containing overarching themes that impacted all schools in the system. Afterwards, principals' comments are presented to give an indication of how those themes were experienced at the school level. Finally, teachers' comments were presented to give a flavor of how the training and the new proficiency descriptions were influencing the curriculum and the classroom environment.

Districts Exhibiting a High Level of Implementation

Dogwood District

Dogwood District had the highest level of implementation of the training and required all staff members (certified and non-certified) to attend 2 full days of professional development. Administrators received the training prior to teachers and helped the RSC plan and conduct the professional development for the remaining staff members. Teachers were required to bring student work samples to use during the training. The work samples included a single student's working folder (which contains various examples of that student's writing) and a classroom set of responses to an open-response question the teacher had previously used in his/her own content area. The teachers met by grade level and by content area to compare the responses and to score student work from other teachers' classrooms.

Teachers from this district were generally very positive about their training experience. Many described it as a necessary step toward the standardization of proficient student work. Others described the training as a natural "next step" for the programs already in place in the district. One principal from this district referred to the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training and the student proficiency descriptions as "the pieces that were missing." The proficiency descriptions were typically enlarged, laminated, and posted in classrooms in this district, particularly for the tested grade levels.

One of the most striking results from this district was the way that the training and the student proficiency descriptions were received among the non-tested grade/subject teachers. Even if a subject area wasn't tested, the training had value to most of these teachers for preparing students for future assessments. They described their role as "preparing students for when they will be tested" or "preparing students to be successful in high school (future grade levels)." For these teachers, a major component of the training was gauging the expectations of their peers and assessing their own students' preparedness against that ruler.

This does not mean that the training was unanimously lauded. Many teachers, especially language arts teachers, considered it redundant. They explained that the training was simply an extension of portfolio scoring training they had already received. They said the training was too long and most of the information presented was simply review for them. A large number of teachers in this district have received portfolio training in the past, but the perception that the material presented during the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond Training was review was particularly prevalent among English teachers.

Dogwood Principals' Comments

When asked to describe the training they had attended, principals were unanimous in their praise. They said the region (RSC) really did a good job of presenting the training. A principal said that training the administrators before the teachers was especially helpful. He also said that having regional trainers conduct the school-level training was very positive. He stated that the trainers had experience in other districts and could share that knowledge with teachers. Another principal said that the training involved people from the grass roots who would be implementing

the standards, which greatly enhanced teacher buy-in. She added, “They really did it right this time.” She said that, with the grid (from the training), teachers could see where a student doesn’t meet the standards. A class set can tell a teacher where she isn’t “teaching to standards.” Teachers know both how to analyze one assignment and a student’s body of work as a whole. Teachers write better open-response questions and are better at evaluating their student’s responses (as a result of the training).

The only suggestion for improving the training was a recommendation that next time teachers bring in examples of student work from each of the NAPD (Novice, Apprentice, Proficient, and Distinguished) categories. One principal thought that teachers tended to bring exemplars. If the purpose of the training is to define what constitutes student work at each of the proficiency levels, it is important to see work from each of the levels. He was concerned that teachers were only bringing in the best responses from their classes and might not leave the training with a good perspective for Novice and Apprentice work.

Principals were cautious but optimistic regarding their impressions of the impact of the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training. One principal explained that teachers had just had an awakening. He said awareness was the big change at this point. The actual deep-rooted change will occur as the standards become part of the regular classroom instruction. Next year teachers will be required to show utilization of the new standards. Another principal had teachers turn in an open response question with a rubric every week. She said that the process had taken some of the subjectivity out of lesson planning.

The principals were similarly cautious regarding their schools’ plans for the student proficiency descriptions. They want to evaluate the impact of the training in terms of students’ scores on the Kentucky Core Content Test. They did describe some acceleration in processes that were already occurring at their schools as a result of the training. Those processes included a variety of activities: (1) trying to have teachers create daily assessments that mimic the state test, (2) assigning more open response and less multiple choice, (3) ensuring high-quality teacher-created assessments, (4) increasing peer review for students, (5) increasing the amount of editing and improving existing pieces done by students, and (6) having teachers show students the progression of a writing sample from Novice to Distinguished, changing it enough to increase its score by one level per day.

When asked about the ways that students were evaluated at the school, and the impact of the training on student assessment, two of the three principals explained that the training was too new to have had much of an impact. The third explained that students at her school talk more about rubrics. The students are involved in making rubrics and refining open response questions. She also said that students “do better knowing what’s expected of them.”

When asked how the evaluation of student work differed in assessed versus non-assessed grades, and how the student proficiency descriptions impacted the differences, principals were mixed in their responses. The middle school principal said that the school was placing emphasis on tested grades without forgetting non-tested grades. The high school principal was very positive about the impact of the proficiency descriptions, explaining that the way the descriptions are written, even though directed to specific areas, they can apply to anything. For example, extensive,

broad, basic, and minimal are the main differences between the levels and those adjectives can be applied to any grade/subject. She said that teachers know their content and can apply the adjectives appropriately. The elementary principal was more skeptical, especially for the primary grades. She explained that there were no good models of proficient student work in the lower grades. She was hopeful about an upcoming training session in which the RSC is to help elementary teachers develop age-appropriate work samples from proficient younger students.

Dogwood Elementary School's principal also noted that the transition from elementary to middle school was a weak area for the district. Elementary schools, as well as the middle and high school, do a good job of collaborating within schools. Many have established common planning for teachers so they can better coordinate their efforts, and there is generally good within-school communication, she added. She said that teachers came away from the training wanting more opportunity to work with teachers from other schools, especially same grade/subject teachers. She was pleased that the training provided teachers an opportunity for collaboration across schools, as well as within schools. She said that the training left 5th grade teachers "hoping" for a renewed effort for collaboration between 5th grade and the middle school. She said she was especially hopeful about collaboration between non-assessed 5th grade subject teachers and their 6th and 7th grade counterparts. Her statement was in reference to the testing and school transition schedules, whereby students take the Kentucky Core Content reading and science tests in 4th grade, transition to a new school in 6th grade, and take their next reading and science tests in the 7th grade.

Dogwood Elementary School Teachers' Comments

Elementary teachers from this district generally had good things to say about the student proficiency descriptions and the associated training. However, when asked to describe any impact on student evaluation, most said that they had already been doing much of what was recommended at the training. One teacher said she hadn't changed her evaluation, although she'd changed the way she looks at evaluation and maybe the way she presents it. She's more thorough now than before the training. Another stated that teachers had enhanced what they were doing before the training. She also said that it's nice to have the indicators to see what the state wants. Other teachers commented that the training had increased their use of testing vocabulary and their awareness regarding standards and testing/scoring.

A few Dogwood Elementary teachers said that they had changed aspects of their teaching. One teacher reported that scoring had changed, that she was making sure students answered all parts of questions, using appropriate content, vocabulary and details, but that she couldn't use open response regularly because it was too time consuming. Another said that students were being held more accountable. The students are "buying in" when they know what is expected of them. Another teacher said that she was asking for more elaboration and details. She said that while she did some of this before, she's added to it. She said she might have accepted less from her students before. Another teacher said that she was looking at more details, rather than just the answer to one big question. A language arts teacher said bulleting was the biggest change. She said bulleting almost went against what she previously taught, but that it was a good way to get thoughts down. Lastly, a teacher reported that she and her peers had previously "pushed hard" on open response, but then they slacked off (with the changeover from KIRIS to CATS). They are pushing

more now, she said, having discovered that it counts so much on the test.

When asked about other changes in their classrooms, elementary teachers either reiterated the changes they made to their assessment practices or told researchers about small changes in their methodology designed to make grading more effective and produce better writing from students. A teacher said that she used the chart (of performance descriptions) as quality control during the year. Teachers also reported using more peer review and more rubrics, and concentrating on having students examine the components of an open-response prompt. A few teachers also said that they now make an effort to display student work, especially final work in writing, art, and science. They make a big production out of “published work.”

Because one of the main goals of the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training was to help teachers define what constitutes proficient student work, teachers were asked if they had students who regularly produced proficient work. They were also asked how they judged that work. A follow-up question asked teachers if their students would know if the work they produced was proficient. The overwhelming majority of teachers interviewed reported that their students would know if they had produced proficient work. The teachers were then asked how the students would know.

All the elementary and middle school teachers interviewed said they had some students producing proficient work. When asked how they made that assessment, the teachers referred to a variety of methods, although only a relative few specifically mentioned the proficiency descriptions presented as part of the training. Many described specific tests such as STAR reading or textbook manufactured assessments. Others included effort as a large component of proficiency. Those who did mention the training said that student work was compared to proficient samples, both from the training and from peers within the classroom.

When asked if students would know if they produced proficient work, the elementary teachers were mixed in their responses. Most said that students would know, especially in the upper grades. Some primary (K-1) teachers, however, explained that their students would not know, nor should they know, if they were doing proficient work. They stated that a big part of teaching at the very low levels was to encourage students. And, as long as students were progressing, they tried to limit the competition in the classroom that would come from overt discussions and comparisons of student work. They explained that the variability in the preparedness of their students on the first day of school precluded any concrete standards of performance. They saw their job as preparing students for the next grade, when their performance would be compared with their peers and with established performance standards. They said that every child must be made to feel successful.

On the other hand, the primary (K-1) teachers did assess students. They used a detailed rating system and a list of goals for student readiness. Parents were kept informed regarding their child’s progression with regular reports. The reports indicate both progress and level, and include ratings of excels, satisfactory, progress, progress with help, or needs improvement.

Other elementary school teachers (grades 2-5) were adamant that their students knew exactly what level of work they were producing. They explained that they used the 1-4 system for

grade reporting and that students were expected to self-correct their writing based on feedback from teachers and peers. One teacher explained that self-evaluation by students was a big part of the writing process. Teachers also told researchers about conferencing with individual students and individualizing instruction, as much as possible, based on rating of the student's work.

Dogwood Middle School Teachers' Comments

Middle school teachers' comments about the impact of the training on student evaluation were similar to elementary teachers' comments. One teacher said evaluation probably hasn't changed a whole lot, but she does like the more specific guidelines. She said it made it easier to show students what she expects for proficient or apprentice ratings. Another said that the training had enhanced evaluation. She said she uses more of the language and puts vocabulary on the board. Another teacher stated that while she had been doing much of this before, sharing with other teachers had given her new ideas. A 7th grade language arts teacher said that, because writing is assessed in the 7th grade, she was working to connect on-demand, open-response, and portfolio writing together. Yet another teacher said that the training had reinforced the way teachers at the school had already been doing evaluation. She said that the major impact of the training was to keep teachers from getting lax.

Several teachers said that the training had increased their use of open-response items in normal assignments and on assessments. One teacher was particularly positive about the training's impact on her open-response techniques. She said the training improved her techniques and that she previously had not been trained in open response or writing rubrics. She was a fairly new teacher, and she stated that the topics were simply not covered in her college teacher preparation program. Another stated that the training "absolutely changed evaluation." She said she evaluates differently now. She hadn't been concerned with other subjects previously. She also has begun to use oral assessments and peer evaluation. Another said that the training taught her "less is more." She said that she realized open-response answers could be concise and still be high scoring.

The middle school teachers' comments regarding other changes focused more on open-response questions than the elementary teachers. Their comments indicate an enhancement or refinement of methods promoted by the school previously. Nearly all the teachers reported either increasing the number of open-response questions used in class or improving the quality of their open-response techniques. Some teachers reported both. Most reported at least biweekly open-response use. Open-response questions were used both on assessments and as regular classroom assignments. Teachers report more time spent talking with students about testing and test scores. One teacher said, that from the student's perspective, they are heading in the right direction (with clear expectations). Another stated that in the past, she tried to provide students with a rubric for open response and projects but didn't manage to provide one every time. Now it is a priority.

A somewhat more subtle change at the middle school was teachers' reporting a new awareness that they rely on teachers in previous grades. A teacher who teaches both tested and non-tested grade/subjects said she was "much more aware." She now looks at what she's doing and what's expected of her. She said she was a firm believer that standards teach that everyone must rely on others. The person who stayed in her room and did her own thing is gone, she said.

(Standards) protect teachers and students from that teacher, she added.

The middle school teachers interviewed were confident that their students knew if their work was proficient. They referred to rubrics and feedback from the teacher when asked how the students knew. They also explained that students used self- and peer-evaluation regularly and were regularly shown examples of proficient work. Student progress reports include the 1-4 designations that match up with NAPD categories. One teacher was concerned that the NAPD categories didn't match up with the traditional ABCDF grades, which the school also reports. Another explained that proficient students knew if their work was proficient, but that lower-performing students might not know that their work was not proficient. She explained that they knew what was lacking, but that might not be equivalent to knowing that the work was not proficient.

Dogwood High School Teachers' Comments

High school teachers were more adamant that the training represented little more than a reinforcement of practices they had already implemented. A teacher stated that the training represented no real change. He said that teachers had changed several years ago to make sure the Core Content was covered. He referred to the blue sheets (a curriculum alignment map) created about 5 years ago. Training just reinforced what they were already doing, he said. Another teacher said she was already using standards similar to these. Most teachers said that the training had little impact on the way students were evaluated. Language arts teachers, in particular, stated that the training represented only a review of previous material.

Some teachers did describe positive changes, however. One said that she was evaluating in much the same way to start with. She was just tweaking in terms of using rubrics and open-response items. She said that the training showed her some techniques for modifying questions, though. Another teacher elaborated on that theme, saying that she got more accuracy in scoring if she had a good prompt from which to start.

High school teachers indicated that, other than assessment, not much changed in their classrooms. A teacher said she gave students guidelines for writing an open response. She said the guidelines would help a minority who wanted to improve anyway. Another said that there was more information posted for students. She referred to a set of guidelines for how to answer an open response in science. The science department made a poster with five steps for answering an open-response question that has been passed around to other departments. A language arts teacher reported that other departments were doing more writing. She said they were "catching up with English (department)." One teacher explained that the training was a review that emphasized the actual descriptions. He said that it left many teachers asking, "How?" He said that he would rather have professional development designed to help students reach proficiency, rather than simply help teachers define proficiency.

Most high school teachers also said that some of their students produced proficient work, although one said that he wasn't sure. When asked how they knew their students were proficient, teachers often referred to a district-created curriculum alignment document. A minority referred to the proficiency descriptions presented in the training. Three high school teachers stated that the

vagueness of the proficiency descriptions and the Core Content limited their ability to really nail down what proficient student work looked like. This was especially difficult in foreign language classes. One of those teachers also explained that proficient work produced in his classroom might not translate to a score of proficient on the Kentucky Core Content Test.

Some high school teachers were unsure if their students knew that their work was proficient. One explained that she didn't use NAPD categories in class. She said that the categories had been discouraged at another school she had worked in because they were too vague. She further explained that parents and students both needed and wanted a number (percentile) score. Another explained that she used "smiley faces" for proficient papers or that she might tell the student "good journal entry," or "well done." She was not sure that students were interpreting the absence of that feedback as an indication that their work was not proficient. The remaining teachers were all sure that their students knew if they had or had not produced proficient work. They explained that the students received regular progress reports in addition to in-class feedback from both teachers and peers. They referred to rubrics and examples, as well as using testing vocabulary as a regular part of classroom assessment, as methods by which students understood their performance levels.

Redbud District

Redbud District implemented the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training in a considerably different manner than Dogwood did, but the requirement for participants to personalize the training with student work samples from their own classes puts them in the high-level implementation group as well. The district focused on scrimmage testing this year as a means of preparing students for the Kentucky Core Content Test and as a means of diagnosing weaknesses in the curriculums and/or instructional methods of the schools. Scrimmage tests were given twice this year in Redbud District for those purposes. Schools used the two sets of results from the scrimmage tests to gauge their progress in correcting the weaknesses they had found.

The schools faced a common set of issues related to scrimmage testing. First, not all grade levels and subjects had a ready supply of released test items from which to construct a scrimmage test. Second, if the schools used items that were not released, and therefore did not have pre-created scoring rubrics, how could they guarantee that scoring would be consistent from school to school or classroom to classroom? Third, even if the district attained internal scoring consistency, how could they know that district-level scoring would be similar to student results on the Kentucky Core Content Test? And last, how could curricular gaps be addressed by having teachers create and grade their own students' scrimmage tests? The district chose to address these issues by combining its emphasis on scrimmage tests with the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training.

Teachers in the Redbud district met as subject-area departments within schools and shared open-response items to be used on the scrimmage tests. Once the first scrimmage tests were completed, the district and the RSC conducted the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training with representatives from each school. Those representatives took the training back to their individual schools and/or departments. Scoring the open-response items from the scrimmage tests was woven into the course of the training. Schools in this district had completed Modules 1 and 2 of the training at the time of our visit (in March). Module 3 was to be completed after the second round of scrimmage tests.

Both teachers and administrators generally viewed the training as positive in the district. They cited the opportunity to share with same-subject teachers from other schools as major factor contributing to the success of the program. The teachers also recognized the scrimmage tests as a method of illustrating the interconnectedness of the different grade levels. Scoring student work from other teachers' classrooms made these teachers appreciate the need for standardization of student expectations, as well. A group of social studies teachers went so far as to add language to the student proficiency descriptions to further eliminate vagueness.

Redbud Training Format

The elementary principal and two teachers attended the 2-day regional training session. Training for most Redbud Elementary School teachers began with a fact sheet containing information from Module 1 of the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training. The fact sheet was followed by a half-day training session with an RSC representative using scrimmage test results as training materials. The half-day training was held at the elementary school on an early release day. Students are released early in the district one Wednesday per month.

The middle school also sent three people (principal and two others) to the 2-day regional training. The three trained persons then conducted Module 1 of the training during an early release day for the remaining staff. The teachers were divided into six separate groups by subject. Groups included fine arts, language arts, math, science, social studies, and vocational applications. Module 2 training was conducted by group at the RSC. Substitutes were hired from professional development funds in order for teachers to spend a full day at the RSC receiving the training. Middle school teachers also used scrimmage test results as materials for the training.

The high school sent four people to the 2-day regional training, including the principal, associate principal, a counselor/assessment coordinator (serves as co-chair of the assessment committee), and the mathematics department head (the other co-chair of the assessment committee). They, in turn, trained the remaining department chairs at the high school on an early release day. The department chairs met with the remaining teachers for another half day (substitutes were hired to cover classes). The associate principal attended both school-level and a portion of the department-level trainings. Department-level training at the high school used scrimmage test results, as well. Self-study and document review was used to supplement the training by some departments due to the short amount of available meeting time. Training format varied substantially by department.

Redbud Principals' Comments

Redbud District principals were all positive about the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training during their interviews. The district is focusing on literacy at all grade levels and they saw the training as a positive way to emphasize open-response questions while at the same time strengthening the scrimmage-testing process. The high school principal gave the most positive review of the training. He said that this was the first (training) that teachers have had to show them how good is good enough. It was written to show what proficient looks like. He also said it was the most helpful professional development they had received.

The principals also said that, because of the focus on literacy at the district level, all teachers had already received an open-response training session earlier in the year. This training was seen as an extension of initiatives already begun in the district. By the same token, the district plans to keep focusing on literacy next year, and principals' comments on plans for the future tended to take that into account. The elementary principal explained that his school would wait to see what happens this year on testing (Kentucky Core Content Test) before making definite plans. The school is considering block scheduling and adding foreign language classes next year. The middle school principal said he would like to see more analysis of student work, modeling of expectations, and "publishing" of student work in the hallways. The high school principal stated that next year the school would devote their half-day per month to review methods, strategies, and (student) work.

Redbud Elementary School Teachers' Comments

When asked to define proficient student work, the elementary teachers gave a variety of answers. One explained that she had been trained in developing open response and working with

rubrics. Her opinion was that teachers who were so trained could distinguish proficient student work as a result of the training. A kindergarten teacher discussed skills that the district had deemed appropriate for kindergarten students. Another teacher included effort as a major component of proficiency. She explained that “proficient is the drive to do well, to have homework done and accurate, to have done extra work. Sometimes (proficient students) assign themselves extra work.” When asked if this described typical or average students, she explained that proficient students were actually “exceptional students.”

When these same teachers were asked if students knew if they were producing proficient work, they responded much the same. One teacher explained that students got their results back from the scrimmage test. She talked about teacher feedback, and told researchers that students often couldn’t voice how they were doing. Another teacher chose to answer the question by explaining that students knew what kinds of questions to expect on the Kentucky Core Content Test by virtue of having completed the scrimmage test. She also said that the released rubrics needed more detail (for scoring). Her take on the question was that if students’ work is accurately scored, then they have a better gauge for judging their own proficiency levels.

When elementary teachers were asked about the impact of the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training in their classrooms and school, their comments were also mixed. One teacher explained that the training made evaluating open-response items more concrete and would “definitely help” her use open-response questions in the classroom. She said that now other content areas have something similar to the standards written for the writing portfolio in language arts. Another teacher explained, “Models of good student work can lead to better student work.” Yet another teacher was not so complimentary about the training, especially the student proficiency descriptions. She said she was overwhelmed by the number of words on the pages of the standards, and the words were not clear. She questioned the difference between “broad” and “extensive,” which are adjectives used to separate levels of proficiency in the standards. She also said that the standards were lower than for similar aged students in another state in which she had taught.

Teachers reported using more open response in class. One explained that she “stressed what kids are getting out of this” more now than previously. Another explained that scrimmage testing represents a large schoolwide change.

Redbud Middle School Teachers’ Comments

Redbud Middle School teachers were less enthusiastic about the student proficiency standards. One explained that the training represented “tweaking” practices already in place more than anything new. She thought the standards were very similar in their wording, making it difficult to use them to distinguish between levels of proficiency. Another teacher elaborated on the same theme by explaining that they (teachers) do not have a good way to know if their own open-response items and rubrics are consistent with Kentucky Core Content Test items. Standards are a big step beyond the general rubric (in the front of test booklets), but they are still open to interpretation. Knowing whether students are progressing is an important part of assessing students, but it is impacted by teacher expectations. Another teacher complained that although she had been teaching for 3 years and knew she needed to use open-response questions, she did not

know how to write them. She explained that the teacher preparation program at her Kentucky college did not prepare teachers to use open-response questions.

Some middle school teachers did report positive impact from the training. They were using more open-response items on internally created assessments. They worked toward creating common open-response items as departments and the interaction between the teachers was seen as very positive. In fact, one teacher explained that she'd like to see the process extend to other schools. Another teacher explained that the Module 1 portion of the training helped her understand the importance of open-response items in terms of test results.

Redbud High School Teachers' Comments

Although most high school teachers were positive about the training itself, they also said that the training had very little impact on their own classrooms or the school. One teacher explained that the new student proficiency standards were "not a lot different from what we were doing." A special education teacher said that the training made the goal more visible but he had little confidence that his students would reach that goal. One teacher was working on National Board Certification and said that he'd found that the performance standards language helped him demonstrate/document his assessment skills as part of that process. Teachers reported that students knew their proficiency level by way of teacher feedback.

High school teachers stated that the way students were assessed in class had not changed due to the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training. One teacher said that previous portfolio training had caused some changes. Others explained that proficiency in their classrooms was determined by participation in class and teacher judgments about that participation. For instance, one teacher said he looks for complex thoughts and another said he rated students based on the questions they ask and the connections they make. The only classroom impact described by teachers was that "the descriptions help with language for expressing class goals." A teacher said that the increased detail helps identify areas on which to focus (to create an improvement strategy).

Spruce District

Several of Spruce District's teachers participated in the state-level standards setting procedures and the activities leading up to the Performance and Beyond training. As a result, many teachers in this district were familiar with the training materials before the training was conducted. The teachers who participated brought some of the information back with them, and much of the rest was available on the Internet for teachers who had been instructed to look for it. Because of teachers' early involvement with the new student proficiency standards, the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training made little impact on classrooms and schools in the district. Teachers were generally positive regarding the training, but most changes in their instruction were made prior to its implementation.

Due to an unexpected school closing, we visited only the elementary and middle schools in Spruce District. Both schools sent the principal and two teachers to the 2-day training. The elementary school principal conducted a 1-day professional development session after the training for all staff members. The 1-day meeting was held on a snow day. All faculty members attended the "snow-day session." Middle school teachers who were involved in standards setting presented much of the information contained in the training modules during a summer retreat for faculty. The remainder was presented during teachers' meetings held after school. The Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training was discussed during two such meetings, each of which lasted about 30 minutes.

Spruce Principals' Comments

Both principals commented on preparation that occurred before the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training. One said that information regarding the student proficiency descriptions was distributed before the training; consequently, attendees were already familiar with the presented material. The other explained that the training occurred as an extension of the school's heavy involvement in standard setting and the timing of the annual school retreat. During the retreat the teachers reviewed the revised standards and had a district representative (who attended the state-level Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training) present the training.

The principals explained that the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training had little impact on their schools. Both said that the training did not cause a shift in teachers' expectations, and both also stated that such a shift was unnecessary. Spruce Elementary and Middle Schools score among the top 15% of schools in Kentucky. The elementary principal said the training reinforced the use of Proficiency Quest, a program based on Kentucky's Core Content for Assessment that was begun prior to the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training. The middle school principal said the student proficiency descriptions helped "draw the lines" between proficiency levels, but that the school had always had high expectations. He also told researchers that the Core Content was already embedded into the everyday processes of instruction and that the instruction included an emphasis on rubrics.

Spruce Elementary School Teachers' Comments

When asked about determining the proficiency level of their students, elementary teachers responded by listing a variety of assessment methods. Proficiency Quest seems to have made more of an impact at the elementary school than the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training or the associated student proficiency descriptions. One teacher explained that the district web site had established a link to “Kentucky Marker Papers,” which were the foundations for defining “beginning, developing, and competent” work in relation to the Core Content. Another teacher said she used Rubistar, a computer program designed for generating rubrics, to assess her students. A group of teachers, all of whom had recently (less than 6 years ago) attended the same university, said that they had gotten a good background for using the NAPD proficiency levels and for scoring portfolios in college. Teachers in the very early grades relied on established yearly goals to determine student proficiency. One teacher explained that school strives to exceed the KELP (Kentucky Elementary Learning Profile) expectations.

When asked about the training’s impact, elementary school teachers generally thought that their instructional practices prior to the training were already more advanced than the training recommended. In addition to Proficiency Quest, many teachers had downloaded the new student proficiency descriptions prior to the announcement of the training. One teacher estimated that the school was 5 years ahead of the schools surrounding it. She said the teaching staff had internalized high expectations. Teachers used 4th grade released items as tools for 3rd grade instruction.

The elementary school serves a fairly low SES (socioeconomic status) population of students but still manages to score well on the Kentucky Core Content Test. In fact, its academic index is among the highest in the state. There is a strong recognition that all teachers contribute to school accountability. A teacher reflected on the commonly heard “apples to oranges” criticism of Kentucky’s accountability cycle. While the phrase is usually expressed as an objection to comparing one cohort of students (potentially less gifted students) to another, this teacher cited the criticism as an excuse for not expecting all students to reach high standards.

Spruce Middle School Teachers' Comments

Several Spruce Middle School teachers worked with KDE during the most recent series of standard setting sessions, including sessions devoted to writing the performance descriptions. As a group, the teachers were very knowledgeable about the training, the performance descriptions, and marker papers that are part of the Proficiency Quest program. They typically referred to these documents when discussing student assessment.

Middle school teachers had some difficulty separating which training session or program elicited any particular change. The Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training was held after the summer retreat, during which teachers reviewed the student performance descriptions and discussed the new standards. The teachers use Proficiency Quest, and were doing so before the training. By the time the region held the training, much of its content was review for the teachers in this district. The largest impact seems to have been the reinforcement of practices the district, and teachers, had already implemented.

Districts Exhibiting a Typical Level of Implementation

Cottonwood District

Cottonwood District took a hierarchical approach to the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training. Typically, each school sent two or three administrators (principals, curriculum coordinators, and counselors, or in one case, a Talented/Gifted teacher) to the training; these people were then responsible for bringing the training back to their schools. In addition, the district involved a special group of district-level trainers who conducted some of the training. Generally, teachers reported that their training was held after school during two roughly 3-hour sessions. Teachers usually reported that all faculty members attended training sessions as one large group; however, they tended to sit by departments. The fairly substantial length of their training and the involvement of a district team in the training puts the Cottonwood District at the top of the middle group of districts in the study.

Training in this district increased the attention given to open-response questions. Teachers at all three schools discussed improvements to the open-response question process. Some said they were more comfortable writing them, while others remarked that they were better able to grade them. For the Cottonwood District, the renewed attention to this type of question, which makes up a significant portion of the Kentucky Core Content Tests, is perhaps the most important aspect of the training.

Although all three principals attended training, they were not the ones who conducted the school-level training. Instead, they delegated that task to others who had attended with them, generally a curriculum coordinator. For that reason, we have included pertinent comments, where applicable, from those people in the description of Cottonwood District. Their comments are attributed to “other administrators.”

Cottonwood Principals’ and Other Administrators’ Comments

The three other administrators each took a slightly different approach to presenting the training at their respective schools. The elementary school administrator, for example, conducted three sessions, presenting information on how scores were obtained, scoring rubrics, and the holistic scoring guide. The middle school administrator, on the other hand, described the school-level training as very general, as she tried to aim the analysis of student work toward an entire class rather than at the individual student level. Finally, the high school administrator said that she had presented training on best practices; her ability to conduct additional training had been hampered by a demanding schedule, she added.

We then asked principals and other administrators about the impact or change that might have resulted from the training or the new standards. While the middle school principal said it was still too early to see many changes, because the training had been conducted before the Christmas break, the other two principals reported that some impact had already taken place in their schools. The elementary school principal noted that there was now a greater focus on introducing and using terminology associated with rubric development and open-response items. The high school principal said that his teachers were now required to use a minimum of six open-

response questions with their students before the CATS testing period. He said that the descriptions have helped teachers clarify and make distinctions between the various proficiency levels, and he added that questions must be proficient themselves in order to prompt proficient responses from students. The open-response practice questions are used in class, with an accompanying scoring rubric given to students, he added.

When asked about plans for the future involving the student performance standards, principals and other administrators generally agreed that more, and earlier, training was needed. The high school principal said that additional training will be held this summer and that they will link the proficiency descriptions to the school's consolidated plan. The elementary school's other administrator said they plan to continue working on improving their open-response questions through a critiquing process. The middle school's other administrator said that additional training focusing on how to implement the proficiency descriptions would be beneficial.

We also asked whether the proficiency standards or training changed the way students' day-to-day work is evaluated. The high school principal said that he had noticed and improvement, particularly in open-response questions. However, he noted that there was room for improvement since tests still have many multiple-choice questions. Increasing the number of open-response questions would be an improvement, he said. Both the elementary school principal and other administrator said that the analysis of student work has changed since the standards were implemented. As an example, the other administrator said that work analysis meant something different to her before the training. Now, she said, she compares current work to work done previously. The high school's other administrator said that she has noticed a mixed acceptance of the standards and resulting changes. Newer teachers, those with 7 years or less in teaching, appear to be more receptive to the standards, she said.

Finally, we asked how teachers know if a student's day-to-day work is proficient. The high school's other administrator said she has seen evidence that some of the newer teachers are examining the standards and picking out key words to use, while the more experienced teachers have developed their own standards over the years. The high school principal said that teachers use the scoring rubrics and proficiency descriptions in addition to more traditional assessments. The elementary school principal said she believed that the descriptions are being used across the board at her school, rather than just in accountability grades. Without something like the descriptions, she said, it was difficult to know when a student's work was proficient. She noted that there were few rubrics for use in primary grades, so her teachers involve their students in creating rubrics.

Cottonwood Elementary School Teachers' Comments

Elementary teachers were asked whether they had students who produced proficient work on a day-to-day basis and how they judged that the work was proficient. All teachers responded that they had students who performed proficient work, and that they used rubrics to help them determine whether the work was proficient. Two teachers said they used rubrics that they had created. One teacher explained that when she writes the rubric, the student work analysis sheet from the training helps her be less subjective. She described proficiency as determining whether students go out on their own and make a higher connection to something.

These teachers also recognized that the training and/or standards had at least some impact on the way they evaluated student work. Two teachers said that open-response questions had been clarified. One teacher explained that open-response questions have been given some focus with the standards; previously, she noted, she resented open-response questions as being too “subjective.” Another teacher said that the student work analysis sheet caused her to take a closer look at things she was missing in students’ work, such as staying on topic. She and another teacher said that now there is more of a sense of how to definitely distinguish between the NAPD levels used in CATS, she added.

On the other hand, some students are still unsure if they are producing proficient work. Some think that writing a lengthy open response is the key to proficient work, but they fail to recognize that their ideas do not tie together, one teacher said. Another teacher expressed a similar idea; describing how some students do not make connections in their writing. Both said that their students helped create rubrics, so they knew what was expected from them.

We asked about any changes in teachers’ classrooms since the training and/or standards. Two teachers reported using more open-response questions, and they said that it was easier to write them now. They were disappointed both in the number and quality of the released open-response questions. They also both mentioned that their current textbooks have material that is geared specifically for Kentucky’s open-response questioning.

Cottonwood Middle School Teachers’ Comments

Researchers interviewed middle school teachers by grade-level teams, since each grade level had a common planning period. When asked if they had students who produced proficient work, all three groups answered affirmatively. They described a variety of methods they used to determine whether the work was proficient, including peer tutoring, journaling, and rubrics. Students who are proficient understand that they must make an extra effort, one teacher said. In the personal narrative, this is evidenced by pre-writing, a focused purpose, and strong leads and conclusions. Another group of teachers recognized proficient work by listening for higher level questioning from students.

When asked how the evaluation process may have changed as a result of the training and/or standards, teachers were more mixed in their responses. Some clearly felt that the evaluation process had changed, while others said it had not. One math teacher said that the new standards seemed to be more a “spin off” from the days when mathematics portfolios were required, and another teacher said they have done this type of evaluation “for years.” Others, however, saw a change that they attributed to the training and/or standards. Reading teachers, for example, said that they are being required to make connections to what is being covered in other content areas.

Teachers said that the use of rubrics, one-on-one feedback, the Rubistar program, state standards and redoing work as necessary are all ways of letting students know if their work is proficient. One teacher noted that being proficient in one subject does not necessarily mean the student will be proficient in others.

When asked about changes that could be attributed to the training and/or standards, one teacher described the use of the “power verbs” that are a recent addition to the postings on the classroom ceiling. Other recent changes may or may not be attributed to the training; science and math are now being taught as separate subjects after many years as an integrated course. One teacher said the recent training had helped her to focus on just mathematics rather than on both subjects, as she had done before the courses were split. Another teacher reported working together more frequently than before since teachers now have a common planning period.

Cottonwood High School Teachers’ Comments

High school teachers generally agreed that they had students who were performing at the proficient level. They also reported using rubrics to determine student proficiency, although one teacher said, after seeing the new descriptions, he felt that it was nothing new. Teachers also used open-response questions, which one teacher said were designed to correspond to the language of the new descriptions. Other methods included class participation, the holistic scoring guide, and simple teacher experience. One teacher defined proficiency as having all parts addressed and going deep into the subject, while another said that it was something original and out of the ordinary.

When asked about changes in evaluation due to training and/or standards, a couple of teachers reported no changes in their classrooms. Others reported “some” change, but one was unsure whether the increased variety of assessments could be directly attributed to the training. This teacher also reported seeing a change in focus in student answers in science; now writing is more focused on facts in the forms of lists, graphs, or charts and less on the wordy, flowing writing of a few years ago. Another teacher described how she tried to bring the new descriptions into use along with the holistic scoring guides.

All teachers reported that students knew if they were performing proficient work; however, some reported that students knew because teachers told them rather than by other methods. For example, one teacher said students were able to judge proficiency because of the amount of re-writing they did, while another teacher told them what to do to improve. Other teachers reported using a variety of methods, including rubrics, feedback, test scores, and examples of proficient work.

When asked about changes in the classroom, teachers reported several indicators of change. The science teacher, for example, said students themselves talk in terms of proficiency now, while another teacher said that teachers are working together more than they did previously. A third teacher said that the use of more open-response questions has resulted from the training. The descriptions were useful in providing examples for terms such as “define,” “explain,” or “compare/contrast,” the teacher said.

Persimmon District

Due to scheduling difficulties, Persimmon County High School was unable to participate in this study. Instead, Persimmon City High School, from the neighboring independent district was substituted. This left us with the unique situation of having an elementary and middle school from the county district and a high school from an independent district. Therefore they are treated separately in this report. The high school is presented first.

Persimmon City High School

One teacher from Persimmon City High School attended the regional 2-day training and then led a training session for the remainder of the staff. The school-level Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training was held after school and lasted approximately 2 hours. Participation in the training was voluntary and attendance estimates ranged from about one half to two thirds of the teachers in the school. The Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training was coupled with a rubric training session held during the same 2-hour period. The teacher presenting the rubric training did not attend the 2-day Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training.

Persimmon City High School Teachers' Comments

Teachers at Persimmon City High School pointed out that day-to-day student assessment, resulting in percentage scores and letter grades, do not match up very well with NAPD proficiency categories. The link between in-class assessments and the student proficiency categories was tenuous for many teachers, and described as even more so for students. One teacher explained that gauging student proficiency has been a problem at the school, but that rubrics had made doing so easier. The teacher went on to say that things were better now, but did not attribute the improvement directly to either the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training or the student proficiency descriptions.

Proficiency categories were typically used only for open-response items, and one teacher explained that doing so presented some difficulties. He stated that students would often panic when they saw an open-response item on a test or as a part of a classroom assignment. The open-response label caused some students in his class to spend too much time on the problem, and conversely caused other students to skip doing the item altogether. The teacher still uses what he referred to as "open-response-like" items on tests, but he doesn't label them as such. All the teachers interviewed at the school mentioned using models to demonstrate proficient answers and make expectations clear for students. Some of those models came from released items, others from textbooks, and still others from exemplar students within the classes. A teacher elaborated on the use of models, telling us that the models were used in order to train students to respond to both very specific and very general rubrics.

When teachers described the impact of the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training at Persimmon City High School, they discussed alterations in emphasis rather than programmatic changes. One teacher said that open response was being used more as a result of the training. Another said that it heightened her awareness of the variety of assignments and encouraged the

writing of more open-response questions and rubrics. Another said that the training caused her to revise previously used open-response questions to better elicit proficient responses from students. A third teacher said that the training had improved her awareness of methodology and encouraged allowing students to teach some concepts to each other. Expectations for student performance have not changed according to these teachers, only the methodology by which those expectations are expressed.

Persimmon Elementary School

Persimmon Elementary School sent three representatives to the regional 2-day training. The principal attended and selected the other two participants, a guidance counselor and a mathematics teacher. The three trained staff members brought the training back for the rest of the staff during a district-wide professional development day dedicated to the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training. School-level training used the same materials as the regional-level training, but the trainers selected the most important aspects due to the reduction in available time. All certified staff attended the school-level training.

Persimmon Elementary School Principal's Comments

The principal was very positive about the student proficiency descriptions. She said that the school needed the descriptions 10 years ago. Since the training, the school has implemented a school-wide general rubric used by all teachers. Teachers still create their own scoring guides, but the vocabulary to describe proficiency has been standardized at the elementary school. The principal believes that students are better able to self-assess when their teachers use a common language to describe their performance. She also said she believes the training has made it easier for teachers to gauge proficiency.

The only negative comment from the principal regarding the training was that it was held during the school year. She would have preferred that it being held during the summer. She explained that she did not like to take teachers out of the classroom and that she had only attended the training with the minimum number of staff members recommended by the district. She chose the one teacher who was removed from class for the 2-day training in part due to a suggestion from the superintendent that she choose a struggling teacher who needed some help with instructional methods. The guidance counselor, who also attended the training, concurred, but added that the training could have been conducted in less time.

Persimmon Elementary School Teachers' Comments

Teachers had comments similar to those of the principal regarding assessing student proficiency. They stated that they used rubrics (both general and individualized by task), models (from the training and others), peer assessments, and self-assessment as assessment tools. Student self-assessment has been a big push at the school recently. Teachers have students self-assess prior to turning in assignments and then conference with them about the accuracy of their ratings. Students then work on methods to improve their scores. This process was described as time consuming, however, and one teacher explained that her students only did two open-response items per year.

The impact of the training on Persimmon Elementary varied somewhat from classroom to classroom. Most teachers indicated that the training had some positive impact on their teaching. One teacher stated that she saw the samples, got to practice scoring, and was more comfortable knowing what each level was. She said that, as a new teacher, the training helped her a lot. Another teacher explained that the training, and the school-wide general rubric that grew from it, improved the continuity between subject areas. A music teacher mentioned that the training caused her to refer more frequently to the Core Content for Assessment when choosing lessons from the text. Another teacher explained that the descriptions encouraged teachers to realize that all students are their responsibility, regardless of grade level. She talked about the link from grade to grade and the dependence of each grade on the previous ones.

The training also led the school to begin the “Partners to Proficiency” program. The program uses the student performance descriptions to help educate parents about proficiency categories. The program has had three meetings so far and each meeting focused on a different type of writing (open-response, on-demand, and portfolio writing). Each grade level does its own meeting and the initial response from parents has been positive, although attendance is still low. Teachers are hopeful that the idea will snowball and generate more parent involvement.

There were few negative comments from teachers at Persimmon Elementary about the training or the proficiency descriptions. One in particular referred directly to the descriptions. A teacher stated that the proficiency descriptions made achieving the distinguished level impossible. She explained that students were not trying for the distinguished level; instead, proficient had become the ultimate goal.

Persimmon Middle School

Training at Persimmon Middle School occurred in much the same manner as at the elementary school. The principal, a guidance counselor, and two volunteer teachers attended the 2-day regional training and conducted an abbreviated version during a single professional development day. All certified staff attended the school-level training.

Persimmon Middle School Principal's Comments

The middle school principal had only complimentary things to say regarding the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training. According to the principal, the training gave the school a good grasp of what to expect from students. It trained teachers to judge and analyze problems (open-response questions). He also said that the training encouraged teachers to give meaningful feedback to students, and that students' work was evaluated differently after the training. The vocabulary from the student performance descriptions is being used with, and by, students. Finally, he said that the training gave Persimmon Middle a model of what proficient student work was, and that it had opened their eyes in terms of student evaluation.

Persimmon Middle School Teachers' Comments

The Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training caused teachers at Persimmon Middle

School to focus more on open response, rubric writing, and vocabulary than previously. The middle school has adopted a common scoring rubric, much like the elementary school. Teachers said that they had rewritten previously used open-response items and their associated rubrics to better elicit proficient responses from students. A teacher explained that she had renewed her emphasis on giving students clear expectations prior to assignments. Several teachers said that they had increased their use of peer review for open-response items and that the common language had improved both peer assessment and self-assessment. One teacher also stated that the training had changed the way she analyzed students' answers to open-response questions.

When asked how proficiency was assessed at the school, several teachers mentioned the student proficiency descriptions (standards) directly. They often mentioned traditional methods as well, but it was common for teachers to say that they compared their students' work to either sample responses from the training or to the descriptions themselves when assessing student work. A teacher also said that students have a better idea about their proficiency level now than before the training. She stated that students were more accurate at self-assessing when they had a rubric. Another teacher explained that when an assignment was completed, students compared their work to a proficient response for the same assignment. The students then redid their own work until it reached the proficient level.

Poplar District

Representatives from Poplar Elementary, Middle, and High School attended the same regional 2-day training event. The elementary and middle school principals attended personally, while the high school principal attended a half-day state principals' committee meeting, during which Education Commissioner Gene Wilhoit discussed the new student performance standards. Poplar Elementary also sent its curriculum coordinator and teacher. The teacher was chosen due to her desire to attend and ability to bring the training back to the rest of the staff. Poplar Middle also sent two teachers, chosen for having previously participated in the standard-setting procedures. Poplar High School sent the assistant principal and two curriculum coordinators, who are also teachers. Representatives returned to their schools and presented the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training to the remaining faculty. Typically, these training sessions were held after school during regular faculty meetings and lasted 1 to 2 hours.

Principals' Comments

When asked about the impact of the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training, the principals were in agreement that it was very early to see much change. The elementary principal said that there was an increased emphasis on the analysis of student work and that the student performance standards had helped in that effort. She said that the Core Content for Assessment covered what students needed to know and that the student performance descriptions (standards) helped define to what extent students should learn that content. The elementary school has set aside more time for teachers to plan together. Using the methods of analyzing student work presented at the training and having the ability to compare notes with other teachers was considered a positive outcome by the principal. She said that teachers regularly struggle, not only with what students should know, but to what extent they should know it.

The principal at Poplar Middle School explained that teachers had begun doing more to keep the content and vocabulary visible to the students in the form of posters on the walls. They've done some work on writing rubrics using language from the proficiency descriptions. He said the school was displaying more student work as an incentive to improve. The school has adopted a focus to ensure that students do their best and take pride in what they accomplish. The principal also stated that the focus on reaching proficiency would have happened at the school without the training. He said that the new student performance descriptions were not a "driving force" at the school. The principal also said the descriptions were too long. The school's math department created its own abbreviated version, which the principal described as a "bare bones" version. He said that there needed to be a similar set of "bare bones" standards for all content areas.

The high school principal said that the curriculum coordinators had distributed the materials from the training and that the examples of proficiency had helped all areas to better understand what proficiency looks like. He explained that the biggest change at the school so far was in terms of awareness. He said the training brought into focus that improvement is based on improved instruction rather than Band-Aids (tricks, such as mnemonic devices used for improving test scores).

Poplar Elementary School Teachers' Comments

Teachers at Poplar Elementary assess student proficiency using student performance standards, rubrics, sample responses, and a school-level curriculum map. They also reported using traditional methods such as observations, testing, and the quality of the questions students ask. They said that their students were aware of the requirements to score proficient because it is specified at the beginning of assignments. The students can refer to posted examples of previous proficient work and teachers reported using marker papers as examples of expectations. One teacher, however, pointed out that the available marker papers for open response were not very good. Students who scored proficient were recognized and rewarded. One kindergarten teacher had even developed an innovative method of encouraging students to use the language of assessment and begin to put together the pieces of a proficient open-response answer. Students who used the correct vocabulary were given a piece of cake (a cardboard cutout to be placed on the board until the full circle or cake was constructed) when they used a correct term for a part of their response. The rest of the students in the class would chant "it's a piece of cake" as the student placed the piece on the board. As a result kindergarten students knew words such as "evaluate" and had a beginning understanding of what was required to perform an evaluation.

The training itself did not have much impact on Poplar Elementary. The school had previously begun a similar program focusing on "quality work." Teachers had difficulty separating the effects of one program from the other. The curriculum map grew out of the quality work program. Aside from a more conscious effort to use the vocabulary of assessment and an overall increase in awareness regarding what is meant by proficient, the teachers reported no change in the school or classroom related directly to the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training.

Poplar Middle School Teachers' Comments

Much like the elementary teachers, middle school teachers stated that most of the changes at the school were in the arena of awareness. Students and teachers have become more aware of what is required to be proficient. One teacher described the change in mathematics evaluation as a new focus on requiring students to show their work. She said that the biggest change was in the distinction between proficient and distinguished. Now mathematics students were required to tell "what" for proficient and "why" for distinguished. A teacher also said that the proficiency descriptions were becoming a big part of the normal school culture at Poplar Middle. She said that everyone knows what proficient looks like now, even in other subjects. Other teachers stated that the training had not changed their expectations at all.

Poplar High School Teachers' Comments

Poplar High School is working on a system of applying the student performance standards within another planned initiative at the school. The faculty has been constructing common open-response items and common final exams to be used in several classes next year. The common open-response items will be written using the student proficiency descriptions as a reference and will be accompanied by exemplar papers to be used in scoring. In the meantime, teachers report that they are trying to consistently ask for more from students. One teacher said that she has not

had time to incorporate all the information from the student performance standards.

Districts Exhibiting a Low Level of Implementation

Catalpa District

Each of the principals from Catalpa Elementary, Middle, and High School attended the 2-day regional training. Each school's SBDM (Site-Based Decision Making) council decided whom to send to the regional training. The middle and high school also sent two teachers each to the regional training. Two parent representatives attended from Catalpa High School as well. The reading specialist and the librarian attended the training with Catalpa Elementary School's principal.

Catalpa District began two programs during the past summer that may have taken much of the urgency out of implementing the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training. The two programs' goals coincide with the goals of Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond to a great degree. The first, Clear Expectations, focused on making sure that students knew exactly what was expected from them on every assignment. It included work with rubrics, teacher feedback, analysis of student work, and establishing standards for acceptable levels of student work. The second, Academic Rigor, focused on increasing teachers' expectations for student performance. Strategies for doing so were coupled with Clear Expectations, resulting in an initiative which functions much like Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond.

None of the participating schools from Catalpa conducted a school-level training session. Catalpa Elementary made the deliberate decision to withhold the information presented at the regional level training until the summer in order to give Clear Expectations, Academic Rigor, and their new curriculum map every chance to have an effect prior to beginning a new program. Catalpa Middle School made an announcement that the state had reset standards for student performance and published the student proficiency descriptions at a faculty meeting. The high school placed information from the training (the descriptions and the grid tool used to evaluate student proficiency) in teachers' agenda books.

Catalpa Principals' Comments

Implementation of the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training has not occurred to any great extent in any of the schools visited in Catalpa District. The elementary school principal said that she had reviewed the material presented with the SBDM council, but that the school was not ready to implement changes yet. She explained that the training had given the SBDM council the clear message that the curriculum at the elementary school was already on track. The school focused a great deal of attention this year on creating a curriculum alignment document. The document contains topics to be addressed by grade level and the depth to which each of those topics should be covered. A former Distinguished Educator (a school change expert from Kentucky's previous accountability system) is on staff and was instrumental in creating the curriculum alignment system. The curriculum alignment system was woven into the Clear Expectations and Academic Rigor programs implemented by the district. The principal stated that adding the requirements from Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond would have created an unnecessary, and largely redundant, layer of complexity for an already extensive retooling of the school's curriculum.

Catalpa Middle School's principal was more positive regarding the implementation of the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training. He said that the school had made the student performance standards available to staff along with Core Content checklists. He also said that the combination of the district initiatives, the Core Content checklists, and the student performance standards had led to an increase in the use of open-response and on-demand questions in classrooms. He could not attribute the increase to the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training, however.

Catalpa High School's principal was less enthusiastic about the student performance standards. He described the descriptions as vague and unhelpful. He said that he was hoping for more change with regard to open-response items because the open-response section of the test accounted for two thirds of a student's score. The students, he said, should be practicing open-response items. The Academic Rigor program has prompted the school to update its requirements for on-demand, portfolio, and open-response writing. Material from the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training was placed in agenda books to inform teachers, but as in the elementary and middle schools, Clear Expectations and Academic Rigor have had a much greater impact.

Catalpa Elementary School Teachers' Comments

Teachers at Catalpa Elementary did not report any changes in their classroom teaching or in the overall workings of their school resulting from the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training. Only one teacher (an attendee of the regional training) reported any impact at all. She stated that, while the training did not change anything in the day-to-day manner in which her class operated, it did "click" for her. She said that the presentation of the research behind the changes to Kentucky's accountability system made her understand those changes. She reported that the training helped her understand the "larger picture." It reinforced the need to push students. She also said that it gave her more perspective on other teachers' requirements and that she could better consider those requirements when collaborating. Other teachers at the school were either unaware of the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training or had only seen the student performance descriptions while visiting the KDE website.

Catalpa Middle School Teachers' Comments

A Catalpa Middle School teacher who attended the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training said that it had simply not been implemented. She explained that the school and district had introduced so many new things prior to the training that it couldn't be done this year. She also said the descriptions were too vague. She said that student samples were not presented for each content area, and that they tended to be from reading. The school has instead chosen to focus on Clear Expectations and Academic Rigor this year. Most of the untrained teachers had not heard of the training program or the student proficiency descriptions. Changes have occurred at the school this year in terms of increasing writing and higher teacher expectations, particularly for open-response writing, but teachers attribute those changes to the Academic Rigor program.

Catalpa High School Teachers' Comments

One teacher at Catalpa High School said she had downloaded the new student proficiency standards and posted them in her classroom. Otherwise, most teachers were unaware of the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training. The teachers who attended the training said that there had been no impact from them yet. Instead, Clear Expectations and Academic Rigor were being implemented at the school. Clear Expectations training was completed in the fall semester and teachers reported that they had begun creating syllabi as well as detailed rubrics and other devices to communicate course requirements more clearly for their students. Academic Rigor was only beginning to have an effect.

Willow District

Willow District schools exhibited the lowest level of implementation of the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training among the participating districts. Of all the staff members interviewed at the three schools, only the principal from Willow Elementary had attended the training. Staff from the high school, who only participated in the study via telephone interviews, had not heard of the training prior to our initial contact (We provided the high school with a copy of the training materials.). Some teachers from Willow Middle had seen the training materials and the student proficiency descriptions while visiting the KDE website, but none had actually attended the training.

Instead, Willow District schools have begun a very large district-level initiative this year to implement a series of pacing guides for common classes within and across schools. The pacing guides include information regarding when to teach specific topics during the course, how much time each topic should garner in the classroom, and sample assignments, lessons, and assessments from each of the topics included. The pacing guide was implemented for a variety of reasons including the high transience rate for the district, a desire for higher expectations at some of the district's lower performing schools, and a desire to begin to standardize what a particular grade in a course means, irrespective of the school at which that course is taught. The pacing guide may include common final exams in the future, as well. However, because so much attention has been given to the newly implemented pacing guides, the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training was largely unnoticed in the participating schools.

The principal from Willow Elementary decided not to bring the training back to her teaching staff. The school is focusing on the district's curriculum map and pacing guides instead. The principal explained that the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training was not as comprehensive as the district's pacing guides. She said that the state's training lacked a rich collection of student work from a variety of content areas. She said that the descriptions were vague and did not give enough examples of types of proficiency. The district's pacing guides begin in Kindergarten and continue through graduation. They include sample open-response questions for each grade level and subject. Teachers at the elementary school use the samples both as teaching tools and as assessments regularly. The school has no plans to implement the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training.

The participating schools may not be indicative of the level of implementation for all schools in Willow District, however. The RSC director did recommend these schools, but only one of them was a first choice. Scheduling conflicts required that researchers request alternates for two of the originally recommended schools. The RSC director also said that a large number of teachers from the region had attended the training (although there was no official count). It is conceivable that the participating schools were anomalous in their lack of implementation of the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training.

School Use of Data

A secondary purpose of this study was to examine the sources of data used by schools to make curricular and other decisions. Researchers asked participants about the kinds of data they used, either in their school or individual classrooms. They also asked participants how they made use of the particular data mentioned. Participants were asked specifically about data disaggregated by demographic factors such as gender, ethnicity, and language proficiency.

It should come as no surprise that teachers and principals commonly reported receiving Kentucky Core Content Test and CTBS data for students. Elementary teachers and principals also reported the use of KERP (Kentucky Early Learning Profile) data. In addition to these instruments, which are required under KERA, some schools reported using other tests. One district, for example, used the CAT-5 in elementary, middle, and high schools, while the elementary and middle schools in another district used the Stanford 9. As a way of preparing their students for the Kentucky Core Content Tests and the CTBS test, some teachers described how they had developed a pre-test or conducted scrimmage tests in an effort to familiarize students for Kentucky Core Content Test or to ensure that the necessary content was being covered. Finally, many elementary and middle school teachers reported using cumulative folders or portfolios that follow students throughout school as another source of information.

Interviewees also reported using a variety of “off-the-shelf” programs, such as Accelerated Reader, Star Math and Star Reading, Test Ready, or Read 180. One district used Brigance (a developmental screen for children and their parents) at the elementary and middle school levels and another district used a literacy inventory from Reading Recovery and Silvaroli (another reading inventory). Some high schools reported using data from ACT and SAT tests and from pre-test versions (PLAN and PSAT) of those tests.

We also found more unusual types of data being used in some schools. Two high schools distribute surveys to parents and examine results for a different perspective. A middle school records the number of negative and positive phone calls. Other schools examine attendance or the number of students making a successful transition from school to college or work.

Some teachers reported their own methods of obtaining data. Several teachers, for example, described listening to the questions that students were asking as a means of gleaning insight into the depth of the students’ thinking. Others developed their own pre-tests or simply used class grades on homework or tests as another measure. A high school teacher mentioned examining scores on Advanced Placement tests, as well.

Disaggregated Data

Each year, schools and districts receive Kentucky Core Content Test data disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and other indicators. Researchers asked teachers and administrators what aspects of the data they examine and what they then do with that information. Generally speaking, teachers and other school officials most often examined results by gender and socioeconomic status, unless they worked in a larger urban district. Issues surrounding ethnicity and English language learners are relatively unimportant to smaller, rural schools because they

have few students in those categories. In the following sections comments regarding disaggregated data are examined using two methods: First, we examined comments for recognition of the “problem.” Second, we examined comments for evidence of a “solution” to the problem. Rather than trying to include every comment, a sample of comments are included to give the reader an idea of the variety of responses that were made.

Gender

Interviewees most frequently reported examining data by gender. Typically, they reported more gender impact at the middle and high school levels than at the elementary (The Gender Gap, 1989). In one district, gender and ethnicity were closely linked, as well.

Recognition of the Problem

- Generally girls score better.
- Observe some peer pressure in boys to not perform.
- ...boys tended to have lower scores on open-response items.
- Gender is a concern, but girls and boys have similar scores.
- Black male students score particularly low.

Evidence of a Solution

- ...addressing those (gender differences) by directing more readings on topics that fit with gender interests.
- Designing programs to bring up males. For example, conducting ESS (Extended School Services) before school to allow athletes and males with jobs to attend.
- ...provided a big shock to other teachers when they saw the discrepancy...used data to investigate gender inequity.

Socioeconomic Status

The second most frequently mentioned factor by which teachers and administrators examine data was socioeconomic status (SES—distinguished in Kentucky by participation in the free- or reduced-price lunch program). This was an important issue for most districts in the study, one which outweighed the influence of minority status among the student population.

Recognition of the Problem

- ...overcoming poor work ethic is the most difficult challenge for many of these students because of family values.
- Title 1 classes are much more than ½ boys.
- Many low SES folk here don’t receive services. They may not know to apply or have help in doing so. Also, because they must reapply every year, many students here get left out.
- ...uses socioeconomic data to track how students on free/reduced lunch are doing academically.

- The biggest gap on test scores is between low SES and the regular population.
- ...very few (high school) kids who are eligible take advantage of the free/reduced lunch program...only 40%...
- There is a 59-point achievement gap between low-income students and regular students.

Evidence of a Solution

- The free/reduced lunch students seem to need, and take advantage, of, an after-school tutoring program. They are also getting extra attention for field trips to increase their life experiences.
- Considering offering a “Parenting Skills” course or workshop for low SES parents, but not implemented yet.
- Recently looked at racial and SES disparity. Did a school-wide book study on the book “Framework of Poverty” by Ruby Payne. Discussed the book chapter by chapter at teachers’ meetings.
- (on the basis of past performance on the Kentucky Core Content Test)...don’t feel that socioeconomic has to be an excuse for poor performance.
- Mentoring is being started because of disparity in terms of SES, but won’t be specifically for low SES students.

Minority and English as a Second Language (ESL)

When coding interview responses, ESL was considered a subset of the minority issue. “Minority” was defined as having to do with a racial minority whose native language is English; while “ESL” was defined as having to do with a group of people whose native language is not English. In the sample, most districts reported that there were few minorities in their area. Because there were so few minorities in those districts, teachers and principals often stated that they treated these students as individuals rather than as members of any group. For large urban districts, however, the performance of minority students is an important component of their Kentucky Core Content Test score analysis. For a few districts, the issue was not so much one of minority students, but rather of ESL students. While it was not a big issue at the time of the visit, officials and teachers nonetheless were aware of the increasing ESL population in their schools.

Recognition of the Problem

- We have very few minorities.
- Haven’t had an African-American kid in my classroom in 2 years.
- Concerned with the growing number of ESL students, although not a large contingent of the school population yet.
- Gender and minority gaps are looked at closely. School has worked really hard on these issues.
- Black males need to work on writing and vocabulary.

Evidence of a Solution

- One team has a Spanish speaker and has a tutor-ESL.
- Minority gap was another impetus for block scheduling, thinking that longer time periods would give more time for hands-on activities.
- They are putting an effort into identifying novels to appeal to minority students (which are about 10% of population).
- Decided that if we could have better communication with minority parents it would help. Had information fair with counselors, department chairs, and representatives from colleges held at community center. Not limited to minorities, however.

Extended School Services

Schools and districts are using the ESS program to offer ongoing remediation to students as an alternative to retention. We note that retention rates are factored into a school's overall CATS score; a high retention rate negatively impacts the score.

Recognition of the Problem

- ESS coordinator uses (data) to get students involved.
- ESS can also be used to address demographic issues.

Evidence of a Solution

- Teachers are trying to provide after-school tutoring for all students if needed.
- Looking at...ESS participation in relation to CATS scores. Found that students who participated in ESS tended to perform higher on CATS.
- Designing programs to bring up males. For example, conducting ESS before school to allow athletes and males with jobs to attend. (Note: double-coded with gender.)

Special Education

Unlike some states, in which special education students are exempt from the statewide assessments, Kentucky requires nearly all special education students to take part in the statewide assessment, either with the same supports specified in the student's 504 or IEP plans or through the alternate portfolio. Schools and districts recognized that they were accountable for the performance of these students on the assessment as well as for the performance of non-special education students.

It is also important to note that students who take part in the Talented/Gifted (TAG or GT) program are considered special education students. It was apparent that some schools and districts were concerned about these students and were examining their performance to ensure that they perform to the best of their abilities.

Recognition of the Problem

- It was really interesting to look at the GT (Gifted/Talented) data....most of the GT scores were where we expected them. But if you looked back at the writing they were not as good...are they just sluffing it off because they know it is not really going to affect their grade at that time?
- Placing special education kids is another big issue.
- Everything is related to Individual Education Plan (IEP) test data. Data use allows focus on special education. Special education coordinator uses data.
- TAG (Talented/Gifted) students not performing where they should.
- ...Look at different methods of learning—focus on each student's needs. If not in 504 or IEP, not taken into consideration.

Evidence of a Solution

- GT incorporated into regular classroom this year—still do some extracurricular activities.
- Special ed needs were identified to help with test taking skills.
- For special ed, individual scores are more valuable than group scores. They could use a tool to break down scores by disability category.

Interpretation and Recommendations

Despite visiting only sites recommended by the RSC directors, the schools and districts participating in this study demonstrate a striking amount of variety. Implementation of the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond Training ranged from schools with full participation, including non-certified staff and administrative personnel, to schools where literally no one had been trained at all. Even among the schools choosing to implement the training, the variety of time allowed for it was substantial. School-level training ranged from the full 2 days to only one half hour. A major factor related to the implementation of the training seems to be the preexistence of a similar district- or school-level program. The two participating districts with the lowest level of implementation of the training were both implementing programs designed to address the definition of what constitutes quality student work. Those programs did not refer to student work using the term proficient, but they were very much concerned with ensuring that students meet some standard and that teachers recognize student work that is indicative of that standard.

Another clear indication of the data collected during this study is that schools are very much concerned with making sure teachers demand that students produce proficient work regularly. Those districts that chose to implement the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond fully, those that chose a more modest level of implementation, and those barely cognizant of the training, all had in place a program to increase teacher expectations. The methodology for improving teacher expectations was also similar. Every participating district, irrespective of level of implementation of Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond, was concentrating professional development efforts on making expectations clearer for students.

The Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training allowed teachers from several districts the opportunity to work with teachers from outside their schools. All teachers who discussed that aspect of the training were very positive about it. Most schools have methods in place to assist

teachers' collaboration efforts. Most of those methods, however, are limited to a single school. The methods include common planning, early release dates, aspects of block scheduling, etc. Opportunities to collaborate with teachers from other schools are scarce. Principals and teachers recognized the lack of collaboration across schools as a weakness in the education system. Increasing that type of collaboration is a goal in many of their schools' Consolidated Plans. This training provided a "jumping off point" for some schools to pursue a more cooperative relationship with other schools in their districts.

Educators' remarks regarding the quality of the training were generally positive. Those districts with very high levels of implementation were typically more positive than districts choosing a lower level. The issues addressed by the Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond training were regarded as important in each of the participating schools. The comments of teachers and administrators seem very much tied to whether the school had chosen to address those issues via some other program.

The most common negative comment about the training was that it was held during the academic year, limiting the potential numbers of participants. Schools are often hesitant to allow teachers time away from the classroom for training. A follow-up during the summer of 2002 might be better received.

Another common comment was that the training was too long. Several teachers and administrators commented that the training could have been completed in half the time. Many suggested that Module 1, which discusses the origins of the standards and the proficiency descriptions, could be eliminated or presented during a separate session for newer teachers. On the other hand, many other educators said that they liked that part of the training the best. They said it let them know that decisions were not always made from the top down. A principal referred to the efforts that created the standards and/or descriptions as "grassroots," and she was very complimentary.

Another common negative comment, which focuses on the content of the training, was that the student performance standards (proficiency descriptions) were too vague. During the course of the training, the student work samples were used to eliminate much of the vagueness of the descriptions themselves. If the training was abbreviated to such a point that sufficient time was not spent with sample student work, this complaint seems more prevalent; however, there are some instances of this comment among those persons attending the full 2 days. In order to limit vagueness, some districts had teachers bring actual samples of student work to the training for scoring. This allowed the teachers in the district to work within their own content area and at their own grade level. It also provided trainees with a wider variety of student work samples on which to apply the performance descriptions. Many teachers brought these samples back for use in their instruction. A plan to either increase the number and variety of student samples included as part of the training, or to require trainees to bring their own samples, would likely help to ameliorate this concern.

Schools and districts regularly struggle with the curricular dilemma of breadth versus depth. Kentucky's Core Content for Assessment has been instrumental in helping establish the breadth of the curriculum in the state. Schools know the topics that are going to be included on the

state's accountability test. The question of depth is only now, more than 10 years into KERA, being addressed at many schools. Early complaints that the curriculum implied by the Core Content was "a mile wide" were to a great extent the lament of the teachers in the assessed grades. Schools have come to realize that teachers cannot teach the entirety of the Core Content for any subject in a single year well enough that students score proficient on the Kentucky Core Content Test. Schools have also come to realize that the link between teacher expectations, classroom grades, and student proficiency levels is often tenuous. For those reasons, schools have begun the process of defining proficient student work, establishing at what stage of the students' education they are expected to reach proficiency, and spreading the responsibility for improving student performance among all teachers in all grade levels. Clearly, Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond can be an important step in that process. It seems equally clear that many schools had taken that step prior to the implementation of Spotlight on Proficiency and Beyond. Defining and demanding proficient student work is a major priority at all the schools participating in this study.

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Appendix A

Correspondence with Participating Schools

Contents

Initial School Contact FAX	A2
Principal Information Letter	A3
Teacher Information Letter	A5
Scheduling Worksheet	A7
FAX-Back Information Form	A8



Human Resources Research Organization
295 W. Lincoln Trail Blvd. Radcliff, KY
40160

Dear Principal «Principal_Last»;

«School_Name» has been recommended by your Regional Service Center (RSC) director to serve as an exemplar in a study being conducted by the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) for the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE). The main focus of this year's study (the fifth school visits study HumRRO has conducted for KDE since 1997) is to examine the impact of the newly published Student Performance Standards and associated training, "Proficient and Beyond." We asked the RSC director to recommend schools that were well represented at the training who were doing exciting things in terms of curriculum and teaching practice.

We will visit «School_Name» on «Visit Date».

If there are any problems with this date, please don't hesitate to call and reschedule. We look forward to visiting your school this year.

Two members of our research staff will spend at least one day at «School_Name». During that time we'll interview teachers and other staff who participated in the "Proficient and Beyond" student performance standards training. If time permits, we may also observe classes taught by those teachers.

While we're at your school, we'd also like to talk to you and your teachers about any curricular changes or changes in practice brought about by the new performance standards, the training, test data, or changes made for other reasons at your school. Even if they did not attend the training, we'd still like to interview teachers and staff members who are involved in curriculum planning as well as planning for teacher professional development. We rely on you and your staff to help us schedule interviews and to help make our visit as productive as possible.

This study includes 24 schools, 3 from each region (as defined by the RSC areas). An elementary, middle, and high school were chosen from each region. We've visited some of the schools in the sample in the past, but others are new this year. We would like to assure schools that are unfamiliar with HumRRO (and remind those that are) that we strive to be as unobtrusive as possible. We will work with you to schedule our interviews and classroom observations, and we hope to only interview teachers during planning time. We keep our interviews as brief as possible to collect our data. We strive to maintain the confidentiality of the participants of our studies. We truly appreciate the time you and your staff gives us and we thank you for giving us access to your school.

Sincerely,
Arthur Thacker

Research Scientist
athacker@infi.net

Feb. 18, 2002

Dear Principal «Principal_Last»;

Thank you for allowing «School_Name» to take part in the fifth round of school visits that the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) has conducted for the Kentucky Department of Education. We look forward to visiting you on «Visit_Date».

As I mentioned in our recent phone conversation, a two-member research team will visit your school on «Visit_Date». During this one-day visit, researchers will interview several people:

- Principal.
- Representatives from the school's curriculum planning and/or professional development committees who may or may not have attended the "Proficient and Beyond" student performance standards training sponsored by your Regional Service Center..
- Teachers and other staff who attended the "Proficient and Beyond" training.

These interviews will last about 30 minutes and may be done at your teachers' convenience—before or after school or during a preparation period. We would prefer to interview teachers individually, but we understand how hectic schedules are and we will accommodate small groups if necessary.

We believe these interviews will help us learn about any curricular changes or changes in practice brought about by the new performance standards, the training, test data, or changes made for other reasons at your school. If time permits, we would like to watch some of your teachers in the classroom; however, interviews are our top priority.

To assist you in preparing for our visit, we have included several items in this packet:

- A letter for teachers and staff that will help explain why we are visiting your school, the interview process, and the purpose of the research. Feel free to make as many copies of this letter as you need.
- An interview scheduling worksheet that should be completed before we arrive.
- An information sheet for you to complete that will help us prepare for our trip. This sheet will ask for alternate points of contact, arrival time, and motel recommendations. We ask that you either mail or fax this sheet to us as soon as possible to help us in planning our visit.

Please don't hesitate to contact me or the other members of the research team (Gene Hoffman, Lee Koger, or Milt Koger) with any concerns or questions. Again, thank you for agreeing to take part in this important research. We look forward to meeting you and your staff.

Sincerely

Arthur Thacker
Research Scientist
athacker@infi.net

Information Sheet for Teachers
Explanation of HumRRO Research

Background

Since 1997, Kentucky schools have taken part in research studies conducted by the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO). Studies have ranged from an investigation of the relationship of teaching practices to KIRIS scores (1997) to an investigation of factors contributing to school success (2001). These studies, and others in intervening years, have taken us into many elementary and middle schools throughout the state.

Current research

This year, our research will focus on the impact that the newly published Student Performance Standards and its associated training, "Proficient and Beyond," may have had in Kentucky schools. We asked each Regional Service Center director to recommend schools that were well represented at the training and who were doing exciting things in terms of curriculum and teaching practice. Your RSC's director recommended that «School_Name» serve as one of three exemplar schools (an elementary, middle, and high school) from your RSC. Your school has agreed to take part in the study. We will be at your school on «Visit_Date», and we are asking for your help in getting the most out of our visit.

As a teacher who took part in the "Proficient and Beyond" training, or as one who is involved in curriculum or professional development planning at your school, it is likely that you will be selected to take part in a short interview during your preparation period on «Visit_Date». We know that planning time is in short supply and we are committed to limiting individual interviews to 30 minutes. We hope to learn about any curricular changes or changes in practice brought about by the new performance standards, the training, test data, or changes made for other reasons at your school.

Although interviews are our top priority, it is possible that we will have some time for observations. If you are using a new technique or strategy that you learned at this training and would like us to see it in action, please let your principal know that you would be willing to have a visitor in your classroom.

Confidentiality

We will not identify participating schools or personnel in any report, presentation, or discussion of this research. No information collected by interview, observation, or conversation will be divulged to any administrator, teacher, staff, or student within your school, or to any Kentucky Department of Education staff member. Written reports will provide information in summary form only. However, because your school may have characteristics that make it unique among Kentucky schools, anonymity cannot be guaranteed. If you or other members of the school staff read the report, you may be able to determine that certain parts refer to your school. It is highly unlikely that anyone less familiar with your school would recognize it in the report. Please remember that this research is being conducted to evaluate the usefulness of the training and the impact it may be having on schools, rather than evaluating the schools themselves.

HumRRO contacts

Please call Arthur Thacker at 1 800-219-9030 or by e-mail at athacker@infi.net if you have any questions or concerns.

We look forward to visiting your school and talking with you.

HumRRO research staff
Gene Hoffman
Arthur Thacker
Lee Koger
Milt Koger

Scheduling Worksheet

When completing this worksheet, please remember that two researchers will be visiting your school. Since they have only one day to complete the visit, they will rely heavily on your help in scheduling interviews and (when possible) observations.

	1 principal	Prof dev person	Curr dev person	Teacher Proficient and Beyond	Teacher Proficient and Beyond	Teacher Proficient and Beyond	Teacher Proficient and Beyond
Name							
Time							
Location							
Name							
Time							
Location							
Name							
Time							
Location							

FAX-Back Information Form

Please fax or mail the following information:

TO: Art Thacker

FAX: (270) 351-3620

MAIL: 295 W. Lincoln Trail Blvd.
Radcliff, KY 40160

FROM:

1. In addition to the principal, who else may we contact, particularly if we need to make last-minute adjustments for bad weather? Are there alternate phone numbers available?

Name	Alternate Phone Number

2. Do we need to know anything about parking restrictions at your school?

3. Can you recommend a motel near your school? (Name, location, phone number)

4. What time does your school day begin (what time do we need to arrive)?

Appendix B

Research Instruments

Contents

Principal Interview Protocol	B2
Teacher Interview Protocol	B3

Principal Interview Protocol

A. Please describe the new Student Performance Standards Training course (*Spotlight on Proficient and Beyond*) that you attended—

- Who presented (state, district, region, school)?
- How long did course last?
- Was it held during school operating hours?

B. How many people from your school attended?

- Who attended?
- How were they chosen?

1. As you know, the student performance standards were written to describe proficient student work in tested subjects for students in tested grades—

- Do you teach a tested grade/subject?
 - On a day-to-day basis, do you have students who produce proficient work?
 - How do you know if a student's day-to-day work is proficient?
- Do you teach any non-tested grade/subjects?
 - How do you know if a student's work is proficient in those classes?
 - Are the student performance standards applicable for these classes? If so, how? If not, why?

2. Have the new standards and/or standards training changed the ways that you evaluate students' work in your classroom?

3. Do students in your class know if they are producing proficient work? (Elaborate)

4. Describe any changes in your own classroom that have resulted (or are planned) from either the training (student descriptions and student work samples) or the new standards themselves.

- Have you seen any school-wide impact or change that resulted from the training or the standards?

5. Did other schools (elementary, middle, or high) attend the training with you?

- Describe your relationship with other schools in the district in terms of communication, curriculum, planning, etc.
- Has either the training or the new performance standards changed your perspective or involvement with the other schools in the district?

6. What sorts of data do you receive (test and otherwise) for your current and past students?

- Describe how you use the data.

7. The school/district receives disaggregated data related to gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language proficiency and possibly some other subcategories—

- Do you use that data, either in the classroom or otherwise?
- What aspects of the data do you use, and what do you do with it?

Teacher Interview Protocol

1. Please describe the new Student Performance Standards Training course (titled *Spotlight on Proficient and Beyond*) you attended—
 - Who presented (state, district, region, or school)?
 - How long did the course last?
 - Was it held during school operating hours?
2. How many people from your school attended?
 - Who attended?
 - How were they chosen?
3. Describe any school-wide impact or change that resulted from either the training (including the student descriptions and samples of student work) or the new standards themselves.
4. Do you have any future plans for the school that involve the student performance standards? Please describe.
5. Have the student performance standards (or associated training) changed the way students day-to-day work is evaluated here? Do you anticipate that they will?
6. The student performance standards were written to describe proficient student work in the tested subjects for students in the tested grades.
 - How do teachers here know if a student's day-to-day work is proficient?
 - Is that different for tested grade/subjects than it is for non-tested grade/subjects?
7. Did other schools (elementary, middle, or high) attend the training with you?
 - Describe your relationship with other schools in the district in terms of communication, curriculum, planning, etc.
 - Has either the training or the new performance standards changed your perspective or involvement with the other schools in the district?
8. What sorts of data do you receive (test and otherwise) for your current and past students?
9. The school/district receives disaggregated data related to gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language proficiency, and possibly some other subcategories. What aspects of the data do you use, and what do you do with it?